

Cook Sir E. J.
1st Baron
Britannia
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BRITAIN'S PART IN THE WAR

BY *Tyas*
SIR EDWARD COOK *1st baron*
A.M.

"Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant Nation rousing
herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks ;
"Methinks I see her as an Eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling
"her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam."

MILTON (1644).

"I see her not dispirited, not weak, but well remembering that she
"has seen dark days before ; indeed, with a kind of instinct that she
"sees better in a cloudy day, and that in storm of battle and calamity
"she has a secret vigour and a pulse like a cannon. I see her in her
"old age, not decrepit, but young, and still daring to believe in her
"power of endurance and expansion. Seeing this, I say, All hail ! Mother
"of nations, mother of heroes, with strength still equal to the time."

EMERSON (1856).

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NOTE.

In earlier pamphlets which have been circulated by the Victoria League, I described, first, How Britain Strove for Peace, and then, Why Britain Went to War. The object of the few pages which here follow is to describe what part has been taken in the struggle by us who did not will war and who had not organised ourselves for it. Nothing is said which is not well known, but all the facts are not always remembered at one time or brought into their true relation one with another. My treatment of a vast subject is slight, and skims the surface: it is intended only as an introduction to a fuller and more adequate treatment of the theme which is being prepared under the editorship of the President of the Victoria League.

E. T. C.

August, 1916.

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BRITAIN'S PART IN THE WAR

"It has long been a grave question," said Abraham Lincoln, "whether any Government not too strong for the liberties of its people can be strong enough to maintain its existence in great emergencies." The question, which Lincoln asked, and answered, during the American Civil War, will long be debated in the case of British democracy and the present war. The end is not yet, and political discussion is beyond the scope of these pages; but two things may already be said without fear that history will contradict them. One of these things was stated the other day by the Colonial Secretary: "There is no part of the British Empire that has not taken its part in the war: wherever it was possible, contingents have been sent, and where that was not possible men have come voluntarily from the ends of the earth to serve in the regiments at home." Whether it be in spite of the weakness of an organisation not too strong for the liberties of the several peoples, or because of it—and both views may be held—the fact is clear that the peoples of the Empire have nobly rallied to maintain its existence in great emergency. It may well be, as Mr. Bonar Law said, that this is "the one fact which will stand out most prominently in the war, and of which the British Empire will for ever have most reason to be proud." The fact itself and the significance are the subject of a separate pamphlet. But there is another fact no less admirable—and only less wonderful because more taken as a matter of course and at the same time less easily grasped. This second fact of which history will take note is that the British people at home, whose Government had striven to the last moment to maintain peace, yet at the call of duty and necessity, cast themselves with full force of temper into the task of organising for war, and threw in their whole weight, in blood, in treasure and in industry, in order to meet the great emergency. The Motherland and "those strong sons of hers" have each been worthy of the other. And both have been worthy of our Allies and of the supreme cause for which all alike are fighting. Let there be no talk or thought of comparisons. This is no case for sums in arithmetic. What each of us owes to the defence of liberty and civilisation is the full measure of his powers and opportunities.

The contribution which the United Kingdom has made, is making, and will make to the common cause is worth describing because for various reasons it is liable to be obscured. One reason is the gradual nature of our effort. Since controversy is outside the scope of these pages, we need not inquire whether the rate could, if affairs had been otherwise ordered, have been quicker. That England's effort has taken time to develop is certain; perhaps this was of necessity; that it is in accordance with our national practice was the opinion of one of the greatest of modern statesmen. "England," said Cavour, "has always begun with forces inferior to her real means of action"; but, he added, she has "grown in strength and in means of action in proportion as the war was prolonged." An increasing effort is not easy to grasp at any one moment. Then, again, the magnitude of England's contribution has been obscured by our inveterate habit of free criticism, and of the spirit of depreciation which it engenders. This may be wholesome, as preventing the good from becoming the enemy of the better, but sometimes, and in some places, it creates a wrong impression. Another reason for some misconception is that our contribution is diverse. Mr. Churchill has described us as "The Great Amphibian"; but we help the allied cause not only by land and sea: we are also in large measure the bankers and the workshop. And much of our contribution is imponderable; or, at any rate, less easily weighed than the sending of contingents or the massing of divisions.

The Navy.

Even the contribution to the common cause made by the British Navy, supremely important though it be, is not always appreciated because so much of it is unseen, and out of sight is out of mind. The Navy secured at the start and has retained ever since command of the sea, thereby rendering possible much of what follows and making certain the eventual defeat of Germany. It has been the sure shield of our own shores. It has enabled the Dominions and India to come to our assistance. It has, in conjunction with land forces, stripped Germany of her colonies. It has driven the enemy merchantmen off the ocean and made the Central Empires, as it were, a beleaguered city. It has rendered common action possible between the Allies and enabled troops to pass from one

distant part to another of their far-flung line. It may be supposed by the thoughtless that this was all in the normal course of the British Navy, and that no great effort of a special kind has been put forth. The facts are far otherwise. What prodigious increase in ships, in guns, in men has been required is known only to those who are in the secrets of the Admiralty. "The growth in our Navy, which has gone on, and which is still going on, is something," said Mr. Balfour to the representatives of the Dominion Parliaments, "of which I do not believe the general public has the slightest conception." In the matter of munitions Mr. Lloyd George has told us one astonishing fact—we have as many men working for our Navy alone as France for her glorious and superbly equipped Army. What ingenuity in resource, what fertility in contrivance, have been brought to bear: these things are more secret still; but one reflection may suffice to set the imagination at work. It was supposed some time ago that the coming of the submarine would undermine the supremacy of the big ship and the big gun. That it has not been so is due to various factors. One is that two can play at the submarine game, and how our young seamen play it has been told by Mr. Kipling in his "Tales of 'The Trade.'" Another factor is the inventive skill of the British Navy, aided by the courage of the "auxiliary" seamen in whom, as Mr. Alfred Noyes has been allowed to show us, the indomitable and resourceful spirit of the old searovers is re-incarnated. It is an old saying that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty; to secure the liberty of the sea under present conditions, perpetual contrivance has to be added to the eternal vigilance. With what success this has been done may be judged from a simple passage in a recent report from one of the Patrols which keep watch and ward over the sea-ways: "Over 21,000 merchant ships, apart from men-of-war and auxiliaries, have passed through this Patrol in the last six months. Of these twenty-one have been lost or have been seriously damaged by the enemy. The losses in merchant vessels therefore have been less than one per thousand. On the other hand, to effect this very considerable security to our merchant shipping, I regret that over 4 per cent. of our Patrol Vessels have been sunk and the lives of seventy-seven officers and men lost to the nation. No figures could emphasise more

thoroughly the sacrifice made by the personnel of the Patrol and the relative immunity ensured to the commerce of their country. Besides the foregoing, the Patrol assists in the protection of the flank of all the sea transport to and from our Army in France. The number of vessels that have passed and also of the troops that have been carried are known to Their Lordships, but it is well to call attention to the fact that this vast transport of troops has been so thoroughly safeguarded that not one single life has been lost during the sea passage."

The Army.

It is a wonderful record, but there is something which history will probably note as more wonderful. After all, it is no new thing for Britannia to rule the waves. This was expected of her; but in all discussions before the present war an Expeditionary Force of small dimensions was supposed to be the limit of her contribution to Continental warfare. The Expeditionary Force was ready when war broke out, and a finer army never left these shores. It played a glorious part and helped France to parry the first German onslaught, taking its share in saving Paris, as afterwards, reconstituted and reinforced, it helped at Ypres to save Calais. Even during the long months of comparatively stagnant trench warfare there was often some misconception of the part played by the British Armies in France and Flanders. It was said in tone of reproach that of an Allied line in the West of 350 miles we held only 40. It was forgotten that along that piece of 40 miles were ranged some 20 divisions of Germans, nearly a quarter of the enemy's Western forces. But all this was only a beginning. At the outset the nation resolved under the inspiration of Lord Kitchener to become, for the purposes and duration of this war, a great military Power on the Continental scale. And it is this which has been done. The time has not come for disclosing the facts in their full import, but two figures have been made public which will enable an understanding mind to grasp the magnitude of the old country's military effort. A few weeks ago Mr. Lloyd George stated that we had then in France ten times more British soldiers than the total of our Army in August, 1914. And 5,041,000 men had been enrolled in the Navy and Army together—this figure being exclusive both of

oversea contingents and of the men who had joined after compulsion had come into force. Of what stuff these men are made the fighting on the Somme has borne witness.

Aviation.

On the vexed question of aviation, it will be sufficient here to quote the concluding words of the Interim Report made by the Committee on the Royal Flying Corps. "There has been an enormous expansion of the Flying Service since the war, and all the critics of the Service without exception have borne testimony to the great progress made in its efficiency—a progress which, although most noticeable since the beginning of this year, is, in the opinion of the Committee, the result of many months of strenuous work. To this efficiency the recent reports from the front bear eloquent witness."

Munitions.

The supply and equipment of the Navy and Army have made a heavy call upon the organising capacity of this country. We hear much, and rightly, of failures here and there; the success goes untold, but "Eye-witness" and unofficial correspondents are agreed that the care and supply of the Army abroad has been and is highly efficient. The munitioning of the forces has led to a marvellous effort in output and organisation. The nation has nationalised its resources for this purpose. Before the war there were three national factories working for the Army; there are now ninety-five. There are more than 4,000 "controlled" establishments. The best business brains of the country have contributed to the common stock. The trade unions have waived many of their rules. Women of every station have become munition workers. Exclusive of the men employed on munitions for the Navy, and exclusive also of the miners, there are nearly $1\frac{1}{4}$ million workmen engaged in making munitions. How great is their output was told by the Minister of Munitions to the House of Commons (August 15th). Of course, the actual figures, which the enemy would like to know, were not given, and comparisons were substituted. Some of these are amazing, not only as proving the magnitude of England's effort, but also as revealing the demands of modern warfare. In one week twice as many shells for light guns, and thrice as

many for heavy guns, are now being turned out as we consumed in the great offensive of September, 1915. The output which in 1914-15 it took twelve months to produce can now be attained from home sources in periods varying from four days to three weeks. The production of high explosives is now sixty-six times as much as it was at the beginning of 1915. Those who have practical business experience, those who know what it means to build up new works, will best be able to realise all that is involved in such results—the energy, the resource, the inventiveness, the good will of all sorts and conditions, directed to a common end. It is good to know that in addition to supplying our own needs we are making a considerable quantity of finished munitions for our Allies. One-third of the whole British production of shell steel is being sent to France. Twenty per cent. of the present machine-tool production of this country is destined for the Allies. Our munition-workers, said the Minister, had borne some part in the glorious victories of Russia, Italy and France. Much more remains to do, in view of the unprecedented demand; but any man of intelligence who takes the trouble to master the facts of what has already been done may well smile at the fables which sometimes gain currency about decadence and sloth in the old country.

“The Silver Bullets.”

The same old country is playing her full part in the provision of what Mr. Lloyd George, before he turned from taxes to guns, called “the silver bullets.” She is raising day by day on the average £5,000,000. She has lent or is going to lend up to the end of the present financial year £800,000,000 to the Colonies and the Allies. She has been able to borrow the vast sums required at a comparatively low rate of interest because she has maintained her credit (among other means) by taxing her people. The revenue estimated for the present financial year is £500,000,000. In the case of an income of £500, the income-tax in the year before the war was £13; it is now £51. The income-tax on £1,000 before the war was £38; it is now £139. On an income of £5,000 the tax before the war was £292; it is now £1,502. The £100,000 man before the war paid £12,458; he now pays £47,129, and if he is liable to “excess profits duty” his total con-

tribution will be over £60,000, or 12s. 3d. in the pound. Such figures have made a profound impression on impartial observers. "It is not only in the rôle of her Navy," said a New York commercial paper, "that Britain plays a unique part among the nations in the great war. The story of her finances is one of the most remarkable developments of the great conflict. The way in which successive increases of taxation have been received by the country bears the most eloquent possible testimony to the unfaltering loyalty of the nation. The Government's policy for keeping the national credit absolutely unimpaired is condensed into the simple rule that they 'never borrow one pound without making provision by new taxation sufficient to cover both interest and a liberal sinking fund.' All in all, one feels profound respect for the spirit in which the prosperous classes of Britain have met a duty less inspiring but no less exacting than that of facing the enemy in the field—the duty of clear-eyed and willing submission to the fiscal demands of their gigantic warfare."

"Business"—but not "as Usual."

But there is more to be told; and what remains is in some ways the most wonderful of all. At the beginning of the war someone invented a phrase which in some respects was most mischievous and misleading, but which in one sense contained an element of truth. As a general maxim "Nothing as usual" would have been a better order of the day; and yet unless to some extent we had been able to do "Business as usual" our power to carry on the war would have been thereby weakened. As a nation, whether at war or in peace, we live on our imports—the food for our bodies and our industries alike comes from over the seas; as a nation unorganised for war, we lived—at first very largely, and to some extent still—on imports of munitions. Now imports are paid for by exports—"visible," as the economists say, or "invisible"); but the war by increasing our imports enormously and by reducing our power to produce what other people want to buy from us, and also by ruling out many of our largest peace-time customers, tends inevitably to create what is called an adverse balance of trade. That is to say, we cannot pay for our imports by equivalent exports in goods: we have to pay in credit or by selling (or pledging) securities. This is the meaning of the mobilisation of securities.

But now comes the wonderful thing. The adverse balance is to some extent being reduced because our export of goods is showing amazing recovery. In June, 1916, the exports were worth $47\frac{1}{2}$ millions, of which nearly 40 millions were in articles wholly or mainly manufactured. The exports for July, 1916, were greater in value than for July, 1914—principally in iron and textiles. Even when full allowance is made for the rise in prices, the fact must be deemed as satisfactory as it is remarkable. For think what it means and what it shows. It means that we are the better enabled to bear the burden of taxation necessary for the maintenance of our credit, and thus give additional strength to the country which is called upon to serve as the economic mainstay of the Allied cause. It shows that the industry and adaptability of the country have been equal to the severest strain. It is "an extraordinary proof," said the "New York Times" in commenting on the recent trade returns, of "England's capacity for business." The capacity applies alike to labour and to capital. Five millions of men have joined the armed forces; another army, more than two millions strong, is making munitions; and yet the export trade is largely maintained. A curious record for a fabled "nation of slackers"!

Women Workers.

To what causes may the remarkable output be ascribed? For one thing, to the help of women. The last century poets are out of date. "For men must work and women must weep"—but women have worked through their tears, and not only in what Florence Nightingale established as their peculiar sphere; though, indeed, the development therein has been enormous. How tiny was her band of pioneers beside the great array of doctors, nurses, V.A.D.'s, canteen-workers, comfort-makers which the devotion and organising power of women have brought into the field! Full particulars will be found in Lady Jersey's pages; but all this might have been done and yet the industrial capacity of the country not have been appreciably increased. What has told is the setting free of male labour by women undertaking work new to them. In Tennyson's line—"Men, my brothers, men the workers, ever reaping something new"—men must now be read as including

women. It is unnecessary here to give illustrations—everyone in his daily walks in London streets, in country fields, can find them; but a few words may be said of the 400,000 women who are employed in making munitions. It is not all of it (and some may think that none of it is) work proper for women, but the spirit which, sometimes at least, is behind the work should be noted. “I went,” said a Member in the House of Commons the other day, “into one workshop where they were not making shells but were making munitions; it was work which women had never done before, and which I should not like to see women continually engaged on. It was heavy, hard, and dirty work. I went up to one strong woman and asked her how she came to be working there. She said, ‘My husband went to the War. He left me at home with my children. I am a strong woman, and I did not like to be doing nothing. I heard of this job and offered my services.’ But this is the point of my story. ‘But, Sir, I dare not tell my husband what I am doing.’ That is the spirit of the women of England, which is going to win the War.”

The Conclusion of the Matter.

It is the spirit which tells. “We could never have secured all this,” said the Minister of Munitions, “unless the whole heart of the people was in the cause. Wherever we have asked for help we have got it. Wherever we have demanded services men and women have laid aside their own interests to serve the cause.” Yet, after all, what interest can any true British man or woman have which is not transcended by the cause of their country? The facts brought together in the foregoing pages show no reason for self-abasement, but neither, till victory be attained, is there room for self-satisfied glorification. It is more fitting to close on the thought which the Roman poet compressed into a famous line:—

*Nil actum credens dum quid superesset agendum.**

* Lucan (*Pharsalia*), of Julius Cæsar: “Thinking nothing done while there remained anything to be done.”

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